

These questions were asked and answered during the Workforce Innovation in Regional Economic Development on-line prospective applicant conference on December 7, 2005. Some answers have been modified slightly from the original transcript to correct grammatical errors, etc., but the original intent of all answers from December 7, 2005 remains the same.

**WIRED Initiative
Frequently Asked Questions, Volume II
December 15, 2005**

Why is there is such a short time between the announcement of this Initiative and the submission deadline?

1. There is a “sense of urgency” for this type of initiative underscored by the Council on Competitiveness report: Innovate America.
2. The SGA limits the proposal submission to 20 pages. (Not a heavy lift for even a moderately experienced grant writer or other professionals in the education, workforce, and economic development fields.)
3. The SGA is not intended to generate proposals from (1) economic regions already implementing successful model efforts as envisioned in the SGA, and it is not focused on (2) regions that are only just beginning to examine this concept. For those applicants in the middle, so to speak, that are prepared to respond, they will easily meet the established due date.

Will there be another opportunity for states to respond under this initiative in the future?

No. We plan to fund eight to ten regions under this competition and work with them for three years.

Is this more about transforming the economy or transforming the systems?

It needs to be both. Regional economies that have struggled with global trade, dependency on a single industry, or natural disasters need to transform to become competitive and provide career opportunities for its people. As part of that economic transformation, the systems and structures that supported the old economy (e.g., the workforce system) must also transform to support a new economy.

For multiple state submissions, how does the proposal count towards each state's limit of 3 submissions?

Multi-state proposals count as a submission for each of the Governors involved.

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In a multi-state proposal, should one state be designated as the grant recipient?

Yes. The partners in the proposal should designate one state and one fiscal agent as the lead for the initiative.

In a multi-state proposal can the fiscal agent be from a different grant recipient state?

Yes. The fiscal agent is designated by the lead governor.

What does the term "regional" mean? Is it multi-county regional or multi-state regional?

It can be both. Applicants should define their region of focus in the proposal and make the economic case for why their selection comprises a regional economy.

Must the definition of the Region match the census definition of a MSA, or some other officially designated definition?

No. Each proposal should define the regional economy as you see it in your area.

Our proposal will include a regional partner whose regional area includes small parts of 2 other states. Can we show outreach to these areas in other states without that governor's signature?

Regions that cross state borders are required to be submitted jointly by the Governors of the states included in the region.

Are individual states being given guidance on how they will select only three applications?

No. The selection of applications is at the discretion of the Governor.

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Economic regions exist without being geographically contiguous – their economies linked by road, rail, air. Requiring that the participants be contiguous seems to preclude innovative approaches to integrating workforce and economic development. Is being contiguous an absolute requirement or can they be linked by a trade route?

Regional economies are typically defined as geographically contiguous areas. However, a proposal that makes an innovative case for a non-contiguous regional economy linked via road, rail, or air will be considered. Non-contiguous areas that only share similar circumstances (e.g. separate BRAC communities) will not be considered.

Can more than one application be selected from each state?

Yes.

Are private associations or employers allowed to partner with community colleges and/or universities for the WIRED initiative grant?

Yes. We want to galvanize these regional networks and build a leadership team consisting of civic, business, investor, academic, entrepreneur, and philanthropic members.

What is the role of the other Federal partners?

The other fellow partners are going to be collaborating at the local level. The important point here is that we think it's important for potential applicants to recognize that this is an effort to involve many different players; therefore, it's important that you partner with your federal partners at the local level including the Department of Commerce and Department of Education.

Will DOL help us get waivers from other federal agencies, in particularly, Department of Education?

Yes. DOL will facilitate the issuance of waivers from other Federal Departments.

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Will you consider proposals with regional partnerships that include small businesses on an equal footing as proposals with partnerships that include large corporate entities?

Yes.

A range of possible regional partnership structures can be envisioned. Are there particular expectations or practices regarding coordination of partnerships for the initiative?

There are no particular practices that we are looking for and we ask you to be creative.

Does an application require a university partner, or can a community college take that role?

There are no required partners other than the workforce system, but it's difficult for us to envision that there would be a winning application without a university or a full spectrum of education partners.

How do you see Community Colleges fitting into this initiative?

In developing a talent pool for a regional economy, all levels of education and talent development should be included. That would include K-12 and all post-secondary alternatives including community colleges and four-year universities.

What role(s) are ones you expect employers to play?

Our expectation with regards to this SGA and your application is that you would represent them as vital components to developing economic strategy and creating jobs and structure their role accordingly.

Would a proposal with a single-industry sector focus be appropriate for a WIRED project?

We expect a proposal dealing with multiple sectors within a regional economy, not a regional economic strategy to deal exclusively with one sector.

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How should we determine whether a regional economy is too “well established” to be considered for funding?

One of the three elements that proposals will be rated on is a “Statement of Need”. The SGA clearly identifies the components upon which this statement will be judged.

Generally, how will the initiative’s geographic selections be made?

The ranked scores of the proposals will serve as the primary basis for selection of applications, in conjunction with other factors such as urban, rural, and geographic balance.

Is this primarily a hurricane recovery effort?

No. The Department of Labor and the Employment and Training Administration responded aggressively to the disasters that hit our Gulf Coast. The WIRED Initiative is separate from the on-going recovery efforts. WIRED is an open competition and awards will be given to those regions with the best applications.

Are the only allowable industry sectors those that are identified in the President's High Growth Training Initiative?

No. The High Growth Job Training Initiative is separate and distinct from the WIRED Initiative

How does "WIRED" relate to the "regional hot spots" concept discussed by the Council on Competitiveness?

We have taken our lead from the Council on Competitiveness with regard to their vision for the hotspots. The hotspots include the economic development strategy, coupled with the workforce development strategy, coupled with the investment and entrepreneurship strategy and that is what they call the innovation hotspot strategy.

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In combining public and private funds to support the project, how is this to occur?

We are looking to leverage resources as much as possible in this effort, so if there are non-grant funds that are going to be used for that purpose, we would expect the applicant to tell us what they are and how they intend to use them.

Is there a required state match for this initiative?

No. There is no matching requirement under this Initiative.

How are leveraged funds defined and what are the submission guidelines?

Leveraged resources are monetary and/or non-monetary contributions supplied by organizations besides the grantee that are used to meet critical workforce challenges, relying on the strengths of each partner and the value they bring in creating a competitive workforce. Leveraged resources are not a requirement of the WIRED initiative; however, applicants are encouraged to leverage the resources of all strategic partners whenever possible. The technical proposal must clearly describe the size, nature, and quality of the resources and how they will be used to further the goals of the project. Leveraged resource dollars should not be included in the budget (SF 424-A).

Can applicants identify other federal grant dollars as leverage?

Certainly, I think if you go back to one of the first questions that was asked about the budget information that had to be submitted, we said that you needed to submit both a budget summary and the budget broken down by various cost categories and that the rest of the budget sheet was optional. Part C of that budget sheet is non federal resources which would provide you a opportunity or a place to identify other resources that are being brought to the table. If you want to do it there, please feel free to do so.

Can WIA/WIB funds be used for the application?

The activities that are proposed to be part of this application are to be funded with the funds that would be provided as part of the grant. If as part of your regional strategies there are activities via-allowable activities that would be part of that strategy, those activities can certainly be paid for by your WIA grant. But the WIA funds are not part of this application or part of this grant.

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Would areas with larger populations be more likely to receive funding than rural regions? Global competition severely affects rural areas traditionally dependent upon single industries or manufacturing. Change in any area can be shared through the WIRED Academy, right?

No. Again it's an open competition. The best applications get funded. And with regards to any change in an area that can be shared through the WIRED academy, yes.

Would greater weight be given to proposals that focus on emerging industries like IT or Biotech, or revitalizing/retaining jobs in more traditional sectors such as durable manufacturing?

No.

What is meant by "innovation" in the context of this proposal? Are you looking for innovative new industries or innovative approaches even if they are within an existing high-growth industry in your region?

Innovative approaches are being sought.

Does the Workforce Investment System have to play a lead role in this Initiative?

The state and local workforce investment system has to be a partner in this initiative. It is not required or necessary that the workforce system at either of those levels be the lead partner in the initiative, however. The structure of the proposal is up to you.

What is your definition of "Workforce System?"

It is the system supported by funds authorized under the Workforce Investment Act and Wagner-Peyser Act.

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Please explain what is mentioned in the SGA under flexibility with regard to waiver authority and Work-Flex authority.

This is authority that exists under current law and it is mentioned in the SGA to ensure that applicants take advantage of all existing flexibility in operating the projects that will be funded. This flexibility is explained in greater detail on our website to help individuals who are not familiar with the work-flex authority and other waiver authorities.

What are your expectations regarding the state leadership role in the implementation of grants at the regional level?

Provide the leadership needed for these projects to be successful or move out of the way and allow someone else to do it.

What specific expertise do the technical assistance providers bring to the table?

They bring with them on-the-ground experience with building innovation in regional economies. They have helped to drive the discussion in terms of transforming our economy and what type of economy the United States should prepare for. And they have experience in creative approaches to educating and training adult career changers.

For those who do not receive the award, will there be an opportunity to get feedback?

There will be a mechanism for feedback on unsuccessful proposals. There will also be a WIRED Academy that will disseminate strategies, solutions, challenges, and other experiences that we learn from this initiative. We will disseminate the information as widely as we possibly can.

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Why must applications that are going to be mailed be mailed by December 31st? Can an application not be sent overnight?

There are four options to submit an application.

1. Submit it electronically through grants.gov.
2. Have it submitted or delivered by an overnight carrier such as Fed Ex, UPS, or USPS express.
3. Hand deliver the application.
4. Submit the application by regular mail. It's only in the case of the regular mail submission that we said it had to be postmarked five days before the due date, which by regular mail means December 31st.

What can grant funds be used for?

Our funds can be used for lots of different things. Funds could obviously be used to provide job training to people. The funds could be used to develop curriculum, build competencies, and to train people in the workforce. They can be used for strategic planning. They can be used for identifying and disseminating information, and they can be used for lots of activities that are aimed at increasing integration of the education system, the workforce system, and the private sector in the regional economy.

Is there a list of prohibited activities?

See OMB Circular.

Are there any occupational or industrial restrictions resulting from grant funds being generated from H-1B fees?

No.

Are we required to use all of the performance outcomes listed in the SGA or can we select particular performance measures that may apply to our proposed project?

All the performance measures identified in the SGA will be used to evaluate the performance of selected regions.

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Does DOL intend for the proposals to include specific accomplishments (number trained, etc.) or are the strategies the intended output?

Yes, we would like to see the impact of what the proposals are attempting to achieve.

Can you provide a more specific definition of "resource mapping"?

We are envisioning a mapping of all factors impacting the strategies. The infrastructure, resources, human capital resources, anything that would impact the overall strategies should be included in the mapping that you're going to be using.

Can you speak more to the evaluation component that will be run by the DOL? Is there an evaluation plan already developed? If so, what will expected participation look like?

For now we're still developing the evaluation plans so I can't share with you beyond that, but I would share with you that what we do have in mind will not be burdensome but will engage folks, and that's important. We obviously want to get your input.

Will the proposal require a budget evaluation summary?

No. There will be an independent evaluation of this proposal, but that evaluation will be carried out and paid for by DOL and is not necessary to be included in your budget.

Do participants travel to the quarterly conferences or are they virtual conferences?

Participants will have to travel to the quarterly WIRED Academies. Meetings in between the quarterly Academies will be virtual.

Do you need a letter of support from all resource partners participating in the project, or can some of the partners come on at a later time?

Some partners could join at a later date. Also, we are not expecting support letters with the proposal. Partners that are involved in the project should be described within the 20 page narrative. Additional support letters will have no bearing on the score of the proposal.

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Please clarify "applicant," vs. "recipient," vs. "fiscal agent." Which of these is the governor, and which is the regional partnership?

The governor is the applicant on behalf of a region. So the governor must submit the application or governors in the case of a multi-state proposal. The governor then designates a grant recipient which will get the money on a day to-day basis and be the contact on a day to-day basis. That could be a public entity. It could be a private entity, whoever the governor designates. The governor may also designate a fiscal agent which is the entity responsible for administering the money on a day to-day basis. That may be the grant recipient or it may be a different agency all together.

What university is handling the WIRED Academy?

Arizona State University

Will awards flow through a state agency or can non-state entities get funded directly?

Funds are awarded to the Governor and then distributed at his/her direction.

Will ETA post and make available to all bidders the results and evaluation studies of past demo projects which were similar to this new initiative, e.g. regional skill partnerships, skill shortages, sector projects, community audits, HGJTI?

Yes, but none of these that have been listed in the question are nearly as expansive or comprehensive as the WIRED initiative.

Will facilitators from DOL consulting partners be available as we need them so that we can eliminate strategic planning/facilitators from our budget?

Yes.

When will the awards be announced?

February 2006.

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Will the department look more favorably upon high-skill, high-wage job creation to pull region's economy up, or on lower-skill, lower-wage job creation to help distressed populations?

This department always looks favorably at high skill-high wage job creation throughout the entire country. The goal is to expand employment and advancement opportunities for workers while simultaneously catalyze the high-high skill jobs and that's part of the WIRED initiative.

With regards to the designated fiscal agent, does that agency have to be a governmental department or agency. Alternatively, could that agency be a private sector or not for profit organization?

No it does not have to be a governmental entity. Governors may designate any entity to serve as a fiscal agent for the project.

Will grant funds be dispersed in a lump sum amount or by reimbursement?

We will establish for you an account in the HHS payment management system and as you incur costs, you may draw down from that account. Because we are contemplating a multi-year effort, the funds will be available one year at a time, so, no, there would not be \$15 million available at the beginning. We would fund the grant \$5 million in the first year, and you would draw that down based on need, and then DOL would add additional money in the second and third year.

What are the funding provisions?

If awarded, funds must be directed by the state according to the proposal that was submitted. Funds will be available immediately following the announcement. Funds are contingent on their availability. See the OMB Circulars or the Cash Management Improvement Act

Will the award be a grant or cooperative agreement?

Grant.